

# the criterion

JOURNAL OF THE ISLAMIC RESEARCH ACADEMY

- \* THE BASIS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ISLAM  
—SAYYID QUTB.
- \* THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNISM  
—A.K. BROHL.
- \* NEUTRALISATION OR DEMILITARISATION OF SINAI:  
A CRUSADO-ZIONIST CONSPIRACY  
—HAMED ALKAFF.
- \* QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS—MAUDOODI.
- \* ISLAM AND COMMUNISM IN CHINA  
—YUSUF CHANG.
- \* THE MARCH OF ZIONISM—M.I. FARUQI.

# THE CRITERION

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## Contents

### Editorial :

Muslims and the crisis of the west. Misbahul Islam Faruqi. 3

### Articles :

The Basis of Social Justice in Islam. ... Saiyyid Qutb, Shaheed 5

A New Crusado-Zionist conspiracy against Muslim Sinai. ... ... Sayed Hamed Alkaff 23

Maulana Maudoodi Answers Questions. 39

### Notes & Comments :

Islam and Communism in China ... Hajji Yusuf Chang 50

### Book Reviews :

A Mirror for Islam's apologists ... Kaukab Siddique 61

Islam in poetry ... ... Haroon Siddique 63

The Arabs speak ... ... Mumtaz Ahmad 65

The Fate of Holy Jerusalem ... Kaukab Siddique 66

What is Freemasonry ? ... ... 68

Guide books for new Muslims ... ... 69

### Review Article :

The March of Zionism. ... Misbahul Islam Faruqi 70

# *Islamic Research Academy*

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1. To promote serious academic research in various aspects of Islam—religion, law, culture and history—in such a manner as to bring out the relevance of its teachings to the problems that confront mankind in general and the Muslims in particular.
2. To make the treasure of classical Islamic scholarship in various fields of learning available to all those who are interested in the study of Islam by arranging the editing, annotation, translation and publication of the works of Muslim scholars.
3. To promote studies about Muslim countries in general, and Pakistan in particular.
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5. To prepare and publish popular and semi-popular books with a view to enable intelligent laymen to have a better understanding of Islam and of the problems of the contemporary Muslim world.
6. To prepare and publish text-books and supplementary readings for various stages of education with a view to give education a constructive, Islamic, bias and content.

## Islam and Communism in China\*

BY HAJJI YUSUF CHANG

### SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAM IN CHINA

Before discussing the problems of "Islam and Communism" in Red China, I would like to introduce you to some of the most important characteristics of Chinese Islam, which have enabled it to grow quite freely and independently without being completely absorbed or assimilated by Chinese culture.

1. *Are Chinese Muslims a religious group or a racial minority?* The Chinese Muslims, except a very few, are the descendants of the Arabs, Turks, or Persians, who immigrated into China during the seventh to fourteenth centuries. They have been related in blood with the Hans through intermarriage. They form a religious group and an ethnic minority. Religious faith and ethnic solidarity are the two fundamental characteristics of the Muslim community in China.<sup>1</sup>

2. *What is the size of the Muslim population in China?* The size of the Chinese Muslim population has been a controversial subject for more than half a century. In 1938, the Nationalist Government gave a total of more than 48,000,000 Muslims in China, whereas the Communist regime gave a figure of only 10,000,000 in 1952.<sup>2</sup> According to the Na-

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\*Hajji Yusuf Chang, Lecturer in Chinese, University of Chicago, read this paper at the upstate conference of the Association of Asian Studies, held at Syracuse University, in October 1967—Editor.

1. Hajji Yusuf Chang, "Islam in Modern China" *Voice of Islam* (Karachi, Jamiyat-ul-Falah Publication, September 1966), XIV, 12/693-5. See also John M. H. Lindbeck, "Communism, Islam and Nationalism in China," *The Review of Politics* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, October 1950), XII, 4/473-5; and Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York, 1961), 432-3.

2. *China Handbook 1954-55* (Taipei, China Publishing Co., 1954), 60; and "Communism and Islam," *Current Background* (hereafter abbreviated as *C.B.*), (Hongkong, U.S. Consulate-General, 25 July 1952), No. 195, 2.

cattle-raisers, and clever business men. They monopolise the mutton-beef trade, and are skillful in running restaurants and inns. The jade trade has been largely operated by them. There were many high-ranking Muslim officials, both civil and military, during the Yuan-Ming period (1280-1644) and in the Nationalist government.<sup>8</sup>

In their daily life, the Chinese Muslims get up before daybreak to perform the morning prayer, and go to bed soon after the evening prayer. In Muslim villages, there are to be found neither pigs nor dogs. There are neither gambling halls, bars, nor houses of prostitution. There the air is fresher, the streets cleaner, and the people healthier. They enjoy very much the games such as horse racing, hunting, or shooting. These differences between the Muslims and the Hans separate them in their daily life. It is only through economic and political interrelations that the Muslims and the Hans meet in public contact, but not in private life.

5. *The Muslim attitude towards Chinese government before Republican period.* In peace time, the Chinese Muslims are good believers and loyal subjects. In war, they always stand by the side of the party or government, which protects the freedom of religion; and they will fight against any side which tries to destroy Islam.

In 757 C.E., it was due largely to the military assistance of the Arab contingent, sent by the second Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-75), that the T'ang Dynasty (617-907) was saved from the rebel forces under An Lu-shan (d. 757).<sup>9</sup> It was mainly with the naval assistance of P'u Shou-keng, a Sinicised Arab, the Superintendent of Merchant Shipping at Ch'uanchou and the Military Commandant of Fukien province during the later years of the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127-1279), who defected to the Mongols in 1276, that Kublai Khan (r. 1260-94) finally destroyed the Sung house in 1279.<sup>10</sup> During the early Ming period

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8. Chang, *op. cit.*, 685: cf. Note 11—some high Chinese Muslim officials at the Yuan and Ming courts. See also T. S. Chen, "General Pai Ch'ung-hsi: Chinese Patriot," *Friends of Moslems* (Hankow, 1943), XVII, 7-9.

9. Ou-yang Hsiu, *Hsin T'ang shu* (Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1936), 221b/12a. See also Broomhall, *op. cit.*, 26.

10. Ch'en Yu-ch'ing, *P'u Shou-keng k'ao* (Shanghai, Chung-hua shu-chu, 1929), 13-16, 21, 26-30.

(1279-1368), Admiral Cheng Ho (1371-1435), a descendant of the Holy Prophet in the thirty-seventh generation, was the first Chinese naval explorer who conducted seven naval expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Middle East in the fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> But after the downfall of the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese Muslims were persecuted by the Manchu and Han authorities. Muslim rebellions in Shensi, Kansu, Yunnan, and Sinkiang, between 1648 and 1878, at least resulted in a total loss of about 10,000,000 lives, sacrificed for Islam.<sup>12</sup>

All the above historical facts speak clearly for the strong characteristics of the Chinese Muslims, who fight for the Chinese rulers when their religion is respected, and fight against the ruling class when Islam is endangered.

## ISLAM AND COMMUNISM IN RED CHINA

1. *Early Communist attempts to secure Muslim co-operation and Muslim reactions.* In 1936, Mao Tse-tung formed a provisional Muslim Soviet Government in the Northwest and even recruited whole regiments of Muslims, granting them full freedom of religion. Since then the Muslims living in the occupied areas have been influenced by the Communists. But according to Nym Wales, "Although the Mohammedans of China are much less fanatical than those in Islam proper, these believers in Allah were still loyal even after inoculation with the virus of Marxism," and "They were prepared to march under the Red Star and the Crescent, but had not yet embroidered the name of 'Karl Marx' on their prayer rugs."<sup>13</sup>

In 1937, when the Red armies moved westward along the route through Kansu, advancing within 300 miles of the Sinkiang border, they were halted by the Muslim forces from Ninghsia, Kansu, and Ch'inghai. They were severely beaten and were driven out of the Kansu

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11. Cheng Ho-sheng, *Cheng Ho i-shih hui-pien* (a collection of work on the life of Cheng Ho), (Shanghai, Chung-hua shu-chu, 1948). See also Paul Pelliot, "Les grandes voyages maritimes Chinois au degut du XVe Siecle," *T'oung Pao*, 1933, 30/237-452.

12. Fu T'ung-hsien, *Chung-kuo huichiao shih* (the history of Islam in China), (Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1940), 115-51. See also Bromhall, *op. cit.*, 155, 162.

13. Nym Wales, *Inside Red China* (New York, 1935), 154, 159.

corridor, and so their plan to achieve a direct contact with Soviet Russia through Sinkiang collapsed. This Communist defeat clearly shows Mao Tse-tung's ignorance, in that, "Islam was not merely the collection of religious ideas of a racial group, but a universal religion which transcended not only race, but also class divisions."<sup>14</sup>

2. *Are there any real Muslim members in the Chinese Communist Party?*

Everyone knows that Communism advocates atheism, and religion is theism. However, there was one Chinese Muslim, by the name of Ma Chun, whom I met in Peking before 1927, who was the Secretary of the Communist Party in Peking. This man who had been trained in Moscow, used to come to the famous Tung-ssu P'ailou mosque in Peking, where I lived for ten years (1922-32) as a student. He came there to attend prayers and keep the fast, but he never made any open Communistic propaganda. However, he was captured and then executed by Chang Tsolin in 1927.<sup>15</sup> He willed to his wife that he should be buried as a Muslim.

Ta P'u-sheng, a famous *Ahung* himself, is now the vice-chairman of the China Islamic Association in Peking. Ma Chien, a graduate of the al-Azhar University of Cairo, is professor of Arabic at the National Peking University, author of many books on Islam, and deputy of the National People's Congress in Red China.<sup>16</sup> Pai Shou-i, a famous historian and Muslim scholar, is an active member of the China Asia-Africa Society in Peking.<sup>17</sup>

I know all these three men personally. They are ardent Muslims. But I do not believe they could be sincere followers of Mao Tse-tung. If they became sincere followers of Mao Tse-tung, then they would not be ardent Muslims. But so far nothing causes me to believe that they have become unfaithful to Islam.

14. Lindbeck, op. cit., 475-8 See also Wales, op. cit., 154.

15. Han Tao-jen, *Wo kuo shih min-tsu ping-teng-ti ta-chia-t'ing* (our country is a big family of equal nationalities), (Peking, Kung-jen ch'u-pan she, 1955), 7.

16. U.S.A. State Department, *Directory of Chinese Communist Officials* (Washington, 1963), 207: "Ma Chien".

17. *Ibid.*, 485: "Pai Shou-i."

Of course, there are tens of thousands of Muslims now in China who claim they are Communists. Whether they are real Communists, or Communists in name and Muslims in heart, is a big question. It can only be solved when the prevailing Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution touches off a general civil war on the Mainland. Then we will find out their real faces, whether they are Communists or Muslims.

### 3. *Contemporary Communist policies towards Islam and Muslim reactions.*

(a) *Mao Tse-tung's racial policies towards Muslims.* After the conquest of Mainland China, the Chinese Communists have considered the Muslims as ethnic groups, but not purely religious minorities. They have been trying to minimise the value of religion, which, according to Communism, must be eliminated.<sup>18</sup> But they have been trying to maximise the value of nationalities. In order to carry out this policy, they proclaimed that in 1958 there were altogether fifty ethnic groups in the border areas,<sup>19</sup> of which ten were Muslim minorities<sup>20</sup> having a total of only 10,000,000 souls.<sup>21</sup> This is an unfounded, unreal, and manipulated figure. Since 1949, they have used the "minority peoples autonomy" and "social reform" in an attempt to destroy the social organisation and leadership of the various small nationalities, and to change the habits of life, social relationships, and religious faith of the Muslims, and thus destroying their national consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

(b) *The three stages of Mao Tse-tung's religious policies towards Islam in China.*—(i) *The First Stage.* Early in 1936, Mao Tse-tung made the following promises to the Muslims in Northwest China:<sup>23</sup>

18. Yu Hsiang and Liu Chun-wang, "The Correct Recognition and Handling of the Problem of Religion," *Selections from China Mainland Magazines* (Hongkong. U.S. Consulate-General, 31 March 1964), 410/49.

19. Li Chiu-yi, "Anti-Communist Struggles of the Chinese Minority Peoples," *Issues and studies* (Taipei, Dec. 1966), III, 3/18.

20. Burhan, "Moslems in China," *Moslems in China* (Peking, 1953), no page numbers are given: Chinese Muslims comprise of ten minorities, i.e. the Huis, Uighurs, Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Tadjiks, Tatars, Uzbeks, Tung-hsiangs, Salas and Pao-ans.

21. *Ibid.* See also, "Communism and Islam," *C.B.*, 195/2-3.

22. Li Chiu-yi, *op. cit.*, 17.

23. Snow, *op. cit.*, 348.



- (1) to help form an autonomous Muslim government,
- (2) to protect Muslim culture,
- (3) to guarantee religious freedom,
- (4) to help unite the Muslims of China, Outer Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Soviet Russia.

These promises were undoubtedly made for the purpose of winning over the Chinese Muslims to stand by the Communists in their struggle with the Nationalists in that area. But sad to say none of these promises has been fulfilled by the Communists. However, it was at about the same time that a mosque was built with their encouragement in Yennan,<sup>24</sup> obviously aiming at getting the cooperation and confidence of the Muslim soldiers in the Red Army.

(ii) *The Second Stage.* This stage begins with the Communist conquest of Mainland China in 1949. It is clearly stipulated in Article 88 of the Constitution of Red China: "Citizens of the Chinese People's Republic have the freedom of religious belief."<sup>25</sup> In fact, Communists give only limited freedom to a religion, provided that religion can be utilised for carrying out their socialist revolution and construction.

Islam, with the Muslim world as its background, being a strong competitor to Christianity, and having never been involved in under-world organisations, is the only religion that Peking rulers are trying hard to utilise in their planned revolutionary conquest of Asia. Because of these reasons, the Chinese Communists allow more freedom to the Muslims than to the Buddhists or Christians. For instance, during the Land Reform, many of the mosques were allowed to retain their lands.<sup>26</sup> The customs and habits of the Muslims are protected by law.<sup>27</sup> Many famous mosques in China have been repaired by the Communists.<sup>28</sup>

24. Lindbeck, *op. cit.*, 483.

25. E. Stuart Kirby, Ed., *Contemporary China* (Hongkong, Hongkong University Press, 1956), p. 18: Article 88 of the Constitution of the Chinese People's Republic.

26. *C.B.* 195/2.

27. *Ibid.* See also Burhan, *op. cit.*

28. "Chinese Moslem Leader on Religious Freedom in China," *Survey of China Mainland Press* (hereafter abbreviated as *S.C.M.P.*), (Hongkong, U.S. Consulate-General, 14 Nov. 1963), No. 3100/15.

Even the circulation of the Qur'an has been aided by Red officials.<sup>29</sup> The China Islamic Association was established in Peking in 1953.<sup>30</sup> It sends Hajj missions every year to Mecca.

(iii) *The Third Stage* The above information sounds promising to the Chinese Muslims, but in fact it is not uniformly bright. Since 1949, many mosques in rural areas have been used as theatres, warehouses, or slaughter-houses. Muslim schools attached to the mosques have been closed. All *Akungs* have to interpret the Qur'an from the Communist point of view. Young Muslims working in factories have been compelled to take the same meals as non-Muslims.<sup>31</sup> The *Newsweek* of 2 September 1966 reports: "Recently the Red Guards dragged a Muslim leader from a mosque in Peking and beat him."

In this year, 1967, the Ch'inghai Provincial Revolutionary Committee issued a proclamation on 12 August emphasising: all party government, financial, and cultural powers in the province belong to the Committee; everyone should "take firm hold of the revolution and promote production"; "all counter-revolutionaries must be resolutely suppressed"; and "the study and application of Mao Tse-tung's works should be carried to new heights."<sup>32</sup>

The spirit of this proclamation is contradictory to Mao Tse-tung's promises made to the Northwest Muslims in 1936. Since Islam as a religion, functions by its cultural power, since a mosque is neither a revolutionary nor a productive organ, since religions are regarded as counter-revolutionary forces by the Communists, and since there is nothing in common between the Qur'an and the works of Mao Tse-tung, can we expect that Islam may co-exist with Communism in China for ever?

29. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1963, No. 2987/28-29.

30. Burhan, *op. cit.*; and *S.C.M.P.* 3100/15.

31. Ma Chien, "Chinese Muslims Stand by other Nationalities in Country," *C.B.*, No. 195/5. See also Pai Jui-ch'ang, *Kun-fei pi-hai chung-kuo hui-p'ao ti pao-hsing* (a general record on the atrocities committed by the Communists on the Chinese Muslims). Taipei, 1957). And Shih Tzu-chou, *Chung-kuo hui-chiao hsieh-hui hui-pao* (Taipei, The Chinese Muslim National League, 1958), No. 61/1.

32. "Chinghai Provincial Revolutionary Committee Founded," *Peking Review*, Vol. X, 34/23.

4. *Is there any coalescence in thought and practice between Muslims and Communists in China?* In thought, there is socialist thinking in Islam, but the so-called "Islamic Socialism" could never be the bed-fellow of Communism. Mr. Gamal Abd al-Nasser once pointed out: "There is a basic difference between our Socialism and Marxism-Leninism. The latter does not recognise religion, but we do."<sup>33</sup>

In practice, both Islam and Communism demand freedom, equality, and fraternity. Both condemn hereditary powers, distinction of races and classes, unequal distribution of wealth, and those who live at the expense of others. But there is a big difference, which is: the Communists always promote class-wars, but the Muslims prefer to adopt peaceful means.<sup>34</sup> Whatever the difference between Islam and Communism, no Muslim, like any other Chinese or other minority leader, dares to criticise the thought or works of Mao Tse-tung, but has to say whatever Mao Tse-tung wishes him to say.

However, there is a coalescence of internal activities between the Muslims and the Communists in China. As the Chinese Muslims are an organic part of the Islamic world of Asia, where the Peking rulers have great ambitions, each side helps the other develop friendly relations between Red China and the Islamic world. The value of Islam to Red China lies in the fact that, through the good offices and efforts of the Chinese Muslims, the latter can win over the friendship of the various Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. On the other hand, Chinese Muslims are willing to be utilised by the Communists and, in return, they receive better treatment.

There is another ideological coalescence between Islam and Communism in China. While the Peking rulers are trying to utilise Chinese Islam in building up good relations with the Islamic world, the Chinese Muslims, through their scholars and leaders, are trying to syncretise Communism with Islam. Among them, the famous ones, such as Ma Chien, Pai Shou-i and Ch'en K'e-li, have written many articles and books on Islam and on the co-relations between Islam and Communism introducing the socialist teachings contained in the Qur'an and the

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33. Abdul Khabeer "Chinese Drop Mask of Religious Tolerance," *Radiance Weekly* (Delhi, 2 October 1966), IV, 11, p. 13.

34. Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Islam and Socialism* (Woking, The Basheer Muslim Library, n.d.), 4-6.

Hadith.<sup>35</sup> Whether syncretism works out well or not for the Muslims under the Communist rule is a question which deserves our close attention.

### CONCLUSION: CAN ISLAM CO-EXIST WITH COMMUNISM IN CHINA?

The world outlook of Communism is materialism, which is basically opposed to the idealist world outlook of religion. Mao Tse-tung said: "Communists may establish with certain idealists or even religious adherents an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal united front in political action, but definitely cannot agree with their idealism or religious tenets."<sup>36</sup> And the Communists believe that with the development of the revolution, the elimination of religion is slow but definite.<sup>37</sup> It is very clear that there cannot be co-existence between religion and Communism in China in the long run.

Although the gradual elimination of religion has been in progress in China since 1949, it seems that Islam may survive Communist persecutions because of its international background and its non-involvement with the West. With these favourable conditions, it has an opportunity to have its roots watered and fertilised through the hands of the atheist materialists; whereas Buddhism, Christianity, and Taoism will be suffocated to death very soon, if they have not already died.

However, as long as the Communists rule China, there will always remain a danger to Islam that sooner or later it will be persecuted. The first possibility for this to occur may be at the time when the Islamic world gives up its neutral attitude in the present world disputes between

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35. See Pai Shou-i's *Hui-mun chi-i-tzu-liao ts'ung-k'an* (Collection of the historical materials of Chinese Muslim uprisings during the Ch'ing dynasty), (Shanghai, Shen-chou kuo-kuang she, 1953); Ma Chien, op. cit.; and Ch'en K'e-li's *Ts'ung Mohammed k'an Islam* (a look at Islam through Muhammad), Peking, Normal College Publishing Department, 1951). Through the lines of these books and article, we will find out that all these Muslim scholars are trying to develop the harmonious points between Islam and Communism by using syncretistic methods.

36. Yu Hsiang and Liu Chun-wang, op. cit., 47.

37. Ibid., 46.

the East and the West, and stands by the West. The second possibility may occur at the time when the older Muslim generation, born before the 1930's, dies. The belief of the younger generation, born after 1949, may be gradually shifted from Islam to Communism.

As a Chinese Muslim, I know that Chinese Muslims are strong in religious belief and racial unity. They are tough and internationally minded. They have had much experience in how to live through persecutions. And I believe that as long as Islam as a religion remains as a decoration in the "Hall of the Chinese Communist Constitution" in Peking, it seems that the Chinese Muslims will not forget to say: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet" as long as they live. (End.)

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### The Verdict of a Sage

"The Arabs are incapable of creating a basis of political unity and stability unless inspired by the Divine Revelation of a Prophet or a follower thereof. This is because their fierce character, pride, roughness and jealousy of one another especially in political matters, makes them the most difficult to lead since their wishes concord but rarely. Should they, however, adopt the religion of a Prophet or a follower thereof, they have an internal restraint and their pride and jealousy are curbed so that it becomes easy to unite and lead them . . . For religion drives out roughness and haughtiness and restrains jealousy and competition. Thus should there arise amongst them a Prophet who calls upon them to follow the ways of God, eschew evil, cling to virtue and unite their wills in support of righteousness, their union becomes perfect and they achieve victory and domination."

— Ibn Khaldan (1332-1406)  
in the *Muqaddimah*, Vol. I, P. 273